

To the Members of the California State Senate:

I am signing Senate Bill 1159 enacting the Disease Prevention Demonstration Project to evaluate the long-term desirability of authorizing pharmacists to sell or furnish 10 or fewer sterile needles and syringes, without a prescription. This pilot program, in conjunction with the Needle Exchange Program (NEP), is an attempt to reduce the incidence of blood-borne infections, including Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), Hepatitis C virus (HCV) and Hepatitis B virus (HBV) related to injection drug use.

The consequences of sharing contaminated needles and syringes have taken a significant toll on the public's health. Approximately one-third of AIDS cases in the United States are associated with injection drug use, and the sharing of contaminated needles is linked to approximately 20 percent of all reported AIDS cases in California. Each year approximately 1,000 Californians become infected with HIV and 3,000 with HCV after sharing dirty needles. Untold numbers are subsequently infected by these drug users. Research conducted on syringe access through pharmacies in other states concluded that access to sterile syringes and needles significantly decreased HIV and HCV, but did not increase drug use or crime rates.

Similar to the current NEP, local governments and local health departments will work closely to implement this program and I anticipate that it will only be implemented where there is local authorization. To ensure public safety and to promote public health, pharmacies that furnish syringes and needles must provide information about accessing drug treatment, HIV and hepatitis testing, and safety storage and disposal instructions to all participants. These programs will provide injection drug users education about proper needle disposal and provide them with the opportunity to safely dispose of needles at the pharmacy.

The Department of Health Services is required to evaluate the efficacy of this program and report the incidence of needle sharing among those who inject illegal drugs, the incidence of blood-borne diseases caused by sharing needles, needlestick related law enforcement injuries, drug crime or other crime rate in the vicinity of pharmacies, the disposal of needles, and the incidence of injection of illegal drugs. Upon review of the report, the Legislature will decide to reauthorize or permanently sunset the program.

My Administration supports this measure because it will prevent the spread of HIV, hepatitis, and other blood-borne diseases among injection drug users, their sexual partners, and their children. For these reasons I am signing this bill.

Sincerely,

Arnold Schwarzenegger